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WEBINAR

WHO GETS ACCESS TO PUBLIC SPACE
IN A PANDEMIC?

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. VEY: Good afternoon everyone. I'm Jennifer Vey, director of the Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking at the Brookings Institution, and I'm a senior fellow with the Metropolitan Policy Program.

On behalf of the center and on behalf of the program, I really want to welcome and thank all of you for tuning into our discussion today on who gets access to public space during a pandemic.

So, since the early days of COVID-19's arrival in the U.S., researchers, journalists, and other prognosticators have been circling around the question of the role of density has played in helping to spread the virus and in helping to mitigate its impacts.

Urban Twitter has been afire on the topic and a flurry of articles, blogs, and podcasts have explored the issues from many angles and with varying points of view.

Density isn't a singular condition, though, and how people experience it -- good, bad, or otherwise -- depends on the home in which they live, the neighborhoods that surround them, and the way in which they travel from one place to another. It is also often determined by the color of their skin and how much money that they have in their bank account.

These disparities long predated the assault of COVID-19, but the virus has preyed upon them in some pretty horrible ways.

New research by the Economic Innovation Group shows that over the past several decades the number of high poverty communities and the number of people living in them has risen dramatically, and there are wide racial and ethnic gaps.

Hispanic residents are four times as likely as non-Hispanic whites to live in a high poverty neighborhood, and black residents are nearly six times as likely.

These are many of the same neighborhoods where low wage workers -- many of whom are now, finally, understood to be essential -- experience many of the negative, and today, downright dangerous parts of dense urban living.

They are the neighborhoods where housing conditions are crowded or substandard, but

where basic goods and services are often sparse; where vacant housing may be ubiquitous even while many of the residents are housing insecure. And unsurprisingly, they are many of the very same neighborhoods where the number of those who will become sick or who have died from the virus are the most concentrated.

So, I'm not going to tackle all these issues in our webcast today. But we are going to explore one key factor in how the conditions of urban density are felt. That is, the extent to which people living in underserved communities have access to safe, high quality public spaces.

So our discussion today is going to focus on the efforts of three organizations to provide equitable access to public spaces, both prior to COVID-19 and right now during the pandemic swimming.

We will also explore how we can, how we must, be thinking far more expansively and creatively about how our public realm can be reimaged to confer health, social, environmental, and even economic benefits, to far more people and far more communities.

So, I'm thrilled today to be able to have this conversation with three experts on these issues. Warren Logan, who's the Policy Director of Mobility and Inter Agency Relations in the Oakland Mayor's Office; Carol Coletta, President and CEO of the Memphis River Parks Partnerships; and Phil Myrick, CEO of Project for Public Spaces.

So, during the program just one housekeeping measure, you can submit questions for panelists by emailing eventsatbrookings.edu, or tweeting to @BrookingsMetro using the hashtag #PublicSpace. I'll try to ask some of these questions in our last 15 minutes or so of our webcast.

Now, I want to dive into it. To start off, what I'd like each of you to do is to give a little bit of background on your work and your organization, and how you have approached the issues of equity in the public realm prior to COVID-19.

So, let's start with Warren. Warren, can you talk about some of the ways that Oakland has identified its underserved communities and has worked to expand an enhanced mobility options for these neighborhoods. What are some of the major equity challenges that your office has been trying to address?

MR. LOGAN: Sure, thanks Jennifer. And I'll actually start with, basically, your introduction, which is that the way that we identified the underserved neighborhoods unfortunately hasn't changed. The underserved neighborhoods have been the same for a very long time and they remain underserved today, and that's really the foundation of where we started.

So, if you look at, for example, where redlining maps were in Oakland, and then overlap that with collision history in Oakland. Or if you look at statistics for where people lack access to jobs or lack access to basic mobility solutions; all of those are the same areas.

And so, we're really just digging into the exact same locations and saying, how do we provide a holistic view for, you know, addressing these historic racial, racist and injustices, quite frankly. And sort of looking back at the history of some of our more recent transportation initiatives.

The City of Oakland actually prioritized something as basic as road repaving primarily in districts in east Oakland that have not received repaving in over a hundred years in some cases.

And it may look kind of basic to just repave streets in neighborhoods that have lacked that, but people take pride in public space when they are invested in. And so that's just an example of the way that we look at that.

Moving forward, we also recognize though -- and again, I'll remind everyone that I'm the mayor's policy director for mobility and inter agency relations -- is that we can't just approach issues in a silo.

So, even though I work hand in glove with the Department of Transportation to address transportation challenges in Oakland, and quite frankly, in the Bay Area, I also recognize that we can't approach our community members, especially our disadvantaged black and brown community members with just transportation solutions because I may say, "Hey, do you want a bike lane?" And they're saying to us, "I want a job." "I want investment." "I want healthcare."

And so, we have to always be looking at this as a holistic conversation. I'll touch on that a little bit more in our conversation, I think, but I'll leave it there for now, that that's the way that we approach -- I'm sorry, my puppy is licking my hand at the same time (laughter) -- that's the way that we

approach injustices in Oakland (laughter), sorry.

MS. VEY: Thanks Warren. So, Carol, can you tell us a little bit about the Memphis Riverfront Parks Partnership and the ways in which a focus on equity is really integrated into so much of your work from workforce issues, hiring practices, to the way in which you program your public spaces.

MS. COLETTA: It is, thanks Jennifer. Memphis River Parks Partnership is a 501(c)(3). It's a public/private partnership. It's been in business for 20 years when long ago the city decided it could not care for its riverfront in the way that it thought it should, and invited this organization to form, and to do this work.

So, we manage five miles of riverfront which for many, many years has not been thought of as connected, even park to park, north/south along the Mississippi River, but certainly not connected from west -- which is where our river is -- back to the east and to neighborhoods.

So, this riverfront is adjacent to downtown, which is thriving, but also three very impoverished neighborhoods that have all the health and economic challenges that poverty brings.

When we think about the riverfront, our mission starts with working with and for the people of Memphis. I don't care if you own a house, if you rent a house, if you have no house at all, if you live in the city of Memphis, you own a piece of this riverfront.

So, because we run public parks, we start, I think, with equity as an underpinning foundation for what we do. And then we pursue an equity strategy, I guess, at a high level, or general level, as pay an opportunity for our employees; free quality programming for people with intentional mixing of people across incomes, and across ages; very aggressive NWBE contracting, as well as purchasing; involving Memphians, especially children, in shaping the parks and their future; and also connecting -- as I said earlier -- connecting the riverfront back into neighborhoods that are most challenged.

MS. VEY: Great, thank you. Phil -- so, Project for Public Spaces was established about 45 years ago to help people create and sustain public spaces that really just help to build communities. How do you engage with communities to ensure that your projects aren't just accessible to diverse groups

of people, but actually are designed by these groups so that the spaces are reflective of the vision, and the values and the needs of the population that they're really meant to serve?

MR. MYRICK: Sure, thanks Jennifer. Our mission is really built around the idea that great public spaces strengthen communities and the people in them, but also that public spaces are only able to fulfill that potential when the people who use those public spaces every day can take part in the process of imagining what purpose they'll be put to, and how they can be an essential part of the community, the community's life.

And so, this idea of community participation is really at the heart of our work. And if done the right way, you know, our process is around building trust and building social ties, and that the public space becomes the setting for communities to build that trust among themselves.

But projects that don't really meaningfully engage diverse audiences, they don't tend to have that same effect and they tend to underperform.

I'll give you one example. A lot of our work is actually in neighborhoods, in cities, that may be struggling along various metrics, whether it's economically or losing population, or fraying around the edges, losing their sense of identity.

A few years ago, in Detroit, working with The Kresge Foundation, and in one of the CDC's, CDC has started a food growing program using local youth, and had asked us to take a look at, is there an opportunity here to improve the overall look and character of this little corner grocer that we want to improve, and sell fresh food in this vacant lot that had this sort of decrepit, old basketball hoop.

And so, you never know what the opportunity is until you start really probing what the neighborhood ideas are. So, you know, our engagement process started in a somewhat traditional way, but it wasn't really reaching our people, so some local folks suggested we do a festival. So, we did a harvest party and all kinds of people came out of the woodwork. I think about four or five hundred people, and you know one of the placemaking outcomes was actually that they continue to do that festival year after year.

But what we heard overwhelmingly was not concerns about the public space, so much

as, how do we get a job? Similar to Warren's point that, you know, we can go in there a preconceived notion, maybe, like biking is really important, or this is one of the big priorities or opportunities here. And then you hear something completely different.

And so in this case, it transformed the project where in addition to this corner grocer and improving this decrepit lot, the decision was to put in a community kitchen, and that every block association leader got a key to that kitchen and they used it as a place to foster entrepreneurship and teach cooking classes and people wound up starting small businesses out of that kitchen.

So, it really -- you know, we have a certain expertise, but community people bring the magic, and if you don't listen to that and really combine those ideas, and combine the resources and expertise that all the different actors bring, including the community, projects just don't go the way they could, and we can't address communities' problems the way they want them addressed.

MS. VEY: Clearly, I think for all of you, the fact that you've been focusing on these equity issues prior to COVID-19 has put you in a much better position to be trying to ensure the more equitable access to public space during this moment.

So, let's talk about some of those issues, and particularly some of the equity challenges that have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and really just how your organizations are responding.

Certainly, we know that sheltering in place orders around the country have heightened the need to provide spaces -- whether that's parks and plazas, streets, sidewalks -- where people can exercise, where they can recreate, where they can get a little bit of fresh air, where they can get away from maybe some of the family members or others they've been, you know, holed up with (laughter), over the last couple of months.

And we know that this is really particularly crucial in communities where private outdoor spaces, such as yards or even balconies, are really limited or they're nonexistent; and whether indoor spaces may simply be pretty crowded and pretty cramped.

So, Carol, let's start with you on this. What are some of the biggest challenges in Memphis in terms of safe access to public space during the pandemic, and how is the Partnership been

adapting its practices to expand and enhance that access to parks, really for those who need them the most.

MS. COLETTA: Well, let me say, our parks did not close like parks in some places did. So, our team has been coming to work every day. So, when I think about safety, I worry first about my team because they've been out there every day doing their jobs that they normally do. So, first and foremost it's, what about the safety of the staff.

But, what's been really interesting -- and again, keep in mind we would be considered on our way to being a glamour asset because we're on a river, but we're also in very close proximity to people who they're households are very low-income -- and what we've seen is during this time they're coming, and they continue to come.

They come on foot, they come on bike-share -- which has been made free during this time -- they come on scooters, they come in cars; and so that's been really interesting. And as we closed our facilities, our restrooms, our parking lot, they still found ways to come and they are there every day, every night. In fact, one of the beautiful things has been watching people sort of reassert what's great about public space.

Gyms have been closed, of course, all those gym classes now take place in the park, and other people are joining in. And I see it individually as well as groups -- socially distanced, of course -- and so that's been wonderful to see.

I'll just say one thing, our mayor made a very sudden, I think unplanned, but very big move when he closed a major four lane road that separates our downtown from our riverfront, which creates access problems that we're trying to plan our way out of.

But in the near term, he closed that street and it has made the riverfront parks more accessible than ever before because people now don't have to cross four lanes of traffic to get there, and they don't feel threatened by that traffic. It's completely safe, and so people have taken up this wonderful, just strolling, a mile out and a mile back every evening during sunset, and it really is just absolutely glorious.

So, access in terms of the space we manage has not really been an issue. Safety is always an issue, both for our staff and then our staff interacts with guests, with our owners, and our stakeholders; and we remind them of distancing when we have to, but we try to do it with a smile, as hosts.

MS. VEY: Can I ask just one follow up conversation? Obviously, you manage a large acreage of parks along the river, and you know that the parks in Memphis haven't shut down. To what extent are there access issues around the city of Memphis?

You mentioned people driving, for example, to the riverfront. Is that because they don't have nearby access in their own communities?

MS. COLETTA: Well, in part it's because -- I mean, it's two reasons, right. We, like many other cities, have not done a great job in recent years of maintaining our parks, and doing the deferred maintenance. We've seen this in cities across America, and that's one of the beautiful things about what's happened in the last decade, I think, is there has been more imagination, more investment, in the capital improvements in parks, and that's thanks to the work of a lot of organizations.

On the other hand, it's still tough to get anyone managing a park, right, any eyes on the park, in an official way, and certainly, they're not always maintained in the way that you'd like to see them maintained.

So, I think one of the reasons that people gravitate toward our parks on the riverfront is because we do have a higher level of maintenance, and certainly, a higher level of management; eyes in the park, people in the park.

But, you know, it's really, I think -- it's a point that Warren made earlier about thinking about this holistically. You can solve some problems by tackling parks, but really, if you want to solve the problem about access to parks, then you've got to solve the planning issue, you've got to solve the budget issue, you've got to solve the transportation/mobility issue. All of those things come together when we talk about access to parks.

I mean, again, I would just say, though, that while we work to get those holistic solutions -

- and we all should, no matter what piece of this pie we're managing -- I think we also have to start with the fact that those of us how are managing what is public -- whether it's public transportation, or public libraries, or public parks -- we shouldn't beat ourselves up too much, right, because we are at least providing that free or low cost access to public.

And I think we provide a foundation for our communities that are essential, and to the extent that that is lifted up and invested in, and more people want that. We build that political support that is so badly needed to maintain these assets -- to develop and maintain and manage these assets -- at a very high quality so that people, no matter how many financial options they have, will choose public. And again, that helps the politics considerably.

MS. VEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. LOGAN: Carol, if you don't mind, I'd love to just tack onto one of your points that one of the -- here in Oakland, we have a huge park that has a lake kind of dead center in the middle of downtown -- for all of the viewers out there. You're welcome to visit when all of this shelter in place is over. One of the challenges we've noticed, though, in sort of the lynch, kind of, all these different issues that you and I have been highlighting, is that there's this issue of trust.

And I think that's that middle component that sort of everything else circles around because we've heard from a lot of our black and brown communities that they don't trust that they're not going to be policed when they go visit a park, and that that has been this really critical element that is not just about physical access or, you know, how do I get to the park, whether it's well maintained, etc. There's this distrust, understandably, that they are going to be policed differently when they're in a public space.

And that's, I think, a component that I really want to highlight during this conversation, is that especially during COVID-19 we're sending these mixed signals, right? We're telling people, "Stay inside because it's safe," right? "Don't touch anyone else. Don't spread the virus." And also saying, "But please spread joy in the community when you're able to at a public park." "Stretch, relax, yoga, whatever."

But there's this middle component that I think people of color are really challenged by, understandably again, that, "Am I going to be arrested for going outside when you've just told me that I should be inside?" That has been a really big challenge for us. And I just wanted to sort of highlight that during this conversation as well.

MS. COLETTA: And it's a very mixed message that we're all getting. You know, what do we do?

Do we bring out workforces back into office? Not. You know, what are we supposed to do? So, that's a challenge I think generally.

But I think the problem you're highlighting is an everyday problem, and it's one of the reasons that we have sort of reorganized our staff, and our job descriptions, and we think about, who is the mayor of this park? Or who is the host of this park? And we try to get all of our rangers to think of themselves as greeters, and to sort of spread community. I mean, that's the idea.

And it's amazing the reaction that you get. But I agree with you, and I think it's one of the sad things about not having people in our parks on a regular basis. There's no one to organize the games, you know, there's no one to -- and that's why I think that we are in a privileged position to be able to host, and to have presence in our parks.

And Memphis is a majority African American city, and a majority African American county in a metro area where the large demographic is African American, and so obviously, our workforce reflects our population, and I think that lessens the concern and the lack of trust; but it doesn't eliminate it.

It's always there, and I think it's incumbent upon us to work hard to gain that trust, and I think it starts with just being -- I mean, taking care of the place, and being a friendly face, and being human.

MS. VEY: Thank you. Actually Warren, I want to come back to you for a second. There's been a really loud call in cities -- not just in this country, but really around the world -- to prioritize the ability of pedestrians and bikers, and others who are not in cars, to prioritize them on public streets during the pandemic, particularly in really densely populated areas where sidewalks often don't allow the

kind of physical distancing that we all need to be undertaking.

So, the City of Oakland has restricted access over 70 miles of streets within the city, which is pretty amazing, and I think you've really been at the forefront of this.

So, can you talk a little bit about why and how you went about making the decision to do this? And particularly, how did you ensure that that decision benefitted all Oakland communities? And as part of that, in thinking about this issue of trust that you raised earlier, like have the decisions that you've made been pretty widely embraced, or has there been some tension?

MR. LOGAN: All great questions, and I -- it's exciting to be a part of an organization that is willing to take risks, especially during these really challenging moments. So, I just really first want to celebrate our safety team for really jumping into the deep end, almost overnight, into taking on this really fantastic effort.

That said, let's start with the why? I think that -- and I almost want to circle all the way back to my original point, which is that in some ways, I shouldn't have to explain to anyone why a department of transportation would want to encourage safe streets ever, and then more importantly, during a time when our hospital beds, for example, are at limited capacity.

And so, I just want to really underscore that this came from a public safety standpoint; that here in Oakland we recognize -- like many other major cities -- we have a really big collision problem, especially fatal collisions between cars and people walking or bicycling. And you know, we never want to see anyone dying on our streets.

So, first and foremost safety is almost on top of mind. So that's when we think about the why.

But it's even more important, then, when we think about the fact that so many people are concerned about their public health, and their safety in this moment of stress and challenges for COVID-19, that we needed to take this even bigger jump to make sure that people are absolutely safe in whatever way we could.

To speak to your how question, I think it was really exciting, and quite fortuitous really,

that just last year we had adopted a bicycle plan that included thousands of people across the city, engaging on what they wanted to see in their -- when I say bicycle infrastructure, it's actually kind of funny because the plan -- if you read it, I encourage everyone to read this plan. It's called "Let's Bike Oakland" -- and it starts with the first chapter which is called "What We Heard. And we heard a lot of different challenges that people shared with us.

Not just, "I want to bike more." "I don't feel safe bicycling." That's sort of a bread and butter bike/ped planning. But also, things like, "I don't feel comfortable bicycling because I'm concerned that I might get arrested for potentially people thinking I stole this bike."

That's a really nuanced approach to bicycle and pedestrian planning that requires some really deep listening. And again, I want to congratulate our safety team on spending thousands of hours collectively, asking these very deep questions, why, why, why.

You know, it's not just a matter of, "Why don't you bike?" It's like, "Why don't you feel comfortable doing something that I think you would enjoy, but you're telling me you don't actually is safe for you?"

So again, sort of circling back: we had this plan, we identified these neighborhood bikeways across the city -- the 74 miles to be exact -- and then just declared them safe streets, slow streets.

And so, it's actually kind of a funny story that we just reminded people of the neighborhood streets that they had just told us they wanted, that we were going to do it.

So, in some ways it's groundbreaking because we made the news a bunch of times. But also, if you look at what we did, we just reminded people that they deserve safe streets all the time.

In terms of reception though, I think that it's really been all over the map. If you follow Twitter, people are really excited. And I don't want to use Twitter as a barometer for virtually anything other than Twitter itself -- but I like Twitter anyway.

But the city sort of makes an L. So, you've got sort of everyone who is west of the lake, and then sort of east of the lake -- which is East Oakland, DB (phonetic) Oakland, and then on into San

Leandro, which is our neighboring city -- but for half the city, they are saying, "We need this permanently. This is fantastic. I'm rollerblading with my kids in the streets. This is awesome." That's North Oakland, that's West Oakland, right.

Then you have East Oakland, which is again, predominantly where our people of color in our city live, and it's been a really challenging reception because I'll say, frankly, I feel like in some cases we might have missed the mark, or that we even have more work to do.

Some folks have said, "This is great, but I don't bike. I don't even have time to walk outside because I'm actually an essential worker." And that's really, again, an interesting intersection that we didn't quite calculate on.

The other issue though, and I will say sort of frankly, it's sort of heartbreaking to hear some of the deeper, almost paranoid responses about safe streets. And I'll share one of them with you cautiously, which is that, some people approached us -- called me on the phone -- and said, "I don't trust you to not arrest me when I use this street. Are you telling me that it is safe for me to walk and play in the street -- in the same street that I feel over-policed in -- on a daily basis? Is this a trap? Is this a trick?"

And it, kind of, breaks my heart to have that as a response because, again, as a person of color, I understand that every day, no matter how much privilege I may have.

And I only share that as story to kind of explain that the narrative around slow streets is really nuanced. And that in some ways, I find myself sort of convincing people, or trying to convince people, that they deserve safe streets, and safe access to their own front door, to their own streets.

And having that conversation is really, really tough because originally when we connected with our East Oakland partners, with their advocates, they said, "Why are you doing this? We need testing. We need mask." And again, that goes back to my holistic view, right. That we can't just approach people with a transportation solution when they're looking for another type of response as well.

And very fortunately, we are now, you know, this is a very iterative process. We're promoting soft closures on different intersections to promote additional safety. This weekend we're actually partnering with our advocates to put out free COVID-19 testing information on all of the

barricades so that it's sort of doing double-duty.

So, we really are trying to each week learn from what we're hearing, and try and address people, physically and figuratively, where they are in place and in the dialogue.

But to sort of answer your question, the reception has been kind of all over the map. But fortunately, our team is all ears. I mean, we have regularly -- weekly, biweekly calls with people, like, okay, "How did it go this week? What can we improve on?" And then that weekend we do out and fix something to make it a better program.

MS. VEY: Great, that was a great answer; very thorough answer, really. I really appreciate that because I think you probably answered a lot of the questions that I bet a lot of our audience today has about your street closure, or restriction initiative.

So, Phil, the pandemic has obviously been a particular crisis for one of our most vulnerable populations, the unsheltered; including both those who are in tenuous, or kind of temporary housing situations, as well as those who are already living in public spaces, even prior to the crisis.

Can you talk a bit about how public space managers can work with our social services agencies and others to ensure that people experiencing homelessness are able to just meet their basic needs right now: food, hygiene needs, and access to shelter?

MR. MYRICK: Sure. You know, in normal times, public spaces are hubs for the community that often draw unhoused people who are looking for a place to hang out, maybe make some money, get information, connect, get food; that's just been really exaggerated during the COVID-19 crisis. Especially because a lot of the indoor spaces that unhoused people rely on are closed.

The other places are all shut down, so public space has become more and more the default place for that activity and so how to respond to that?

We're seeing some really interesting success stories which actually predate COVID-19 but that have really responded well to the current crisis.

So, for example, Woodruff Park in Atlanta, which is a downtown, small park that we worked with a couple of years ago with central (inaudible) progress. When we started working with

Woodruff Park, of course, the initial idea was to create a great public space that's vibrant and fosters social connections for Atlantans, but it's really become this more resilient space that has contributed to wellbeing even now.

So, it had a homelessness problem prior to COVID-19, and one of ideas that we came up with was to actually -- you know, we're big believers in public space management and that successful public spaces often need a presence on site to manage the experience, and be the host and the ambassador, like Carol said, it's really a critical role.

In this case, I think that this is maybe the first time that we've done this, and I don't know of another example, but one of the staff people at Woodruff Park that was hired was a social worker, a licensed social worker.

And so, she is part of that small park staff. She is one of the ambassadors and she does a variety of things, but she's also a qualified social worker who works with the houseless and homeless population in the park.

So, she gets to know them, she greets them, she knows their names, she's building trust over time, and she services them. So, she'll ask them, "What kind of help do you need?" And she has her fingertips on all the city's resources, in terms of agencies that can back up her offers.

So, during the last, I think, year and a half or so, she's placed at least 300 people in shelters and almost 150 in permanent housing, just through being on site in Woodruff Park, and being a person who's trusted, and who is this ongoing presence.

So, during COVID-19 she can play an even larger role in this task. And during the lockdown, of course, the homeless are almost the only people in that park. That is the case in many public spaces.

There's a lot of other things that goes along with doing this well. One is PPE, right, which we hear about over and over again. So, how do you protect your service workers and your population who's in those public spaces by approaching them with the safety precautions in place, like face masks and other PPE?

When it comes to food distribution, we've seen that public space managers can really work with city experts to provide food. A lot of these food shelters have actually shut down, and so they're looking for other ways to distribute food safely. So, these public spaces can become a really important place to provide that role.

Another interesting thing, back to Woodruff Park, is that they've actually brought in mobile washing stations. So, they have a bathroom, they've kept it open through the lockdown, but they've added these mobile handwashing stations so that there's an additional level of hygiene that can help those folks who are spending their time there really protect themselves.

You know, there are other examples, like the City of Portland, Oregon, has tried to have these containers that are daytime storage units. They actually -- they are supervised and lockable storage containers where people who have possessions that don't have a house can put them there and they can trust that they're kept safely and they're not going to get stolen.

And they actually come with outlets and Wi-Fi because a lot of them -- you know, this need for an outlet is vastly curtailed for the houseless population because they can't go into a restaurant, they can't go to a McDonald's or Starbucks and charge a device. So that's another feature in that storage container.

I just think, and hopeful to continue to explore, that there's an incredible range of ways that public spaces can serve the needs of people in a crisis, including temporary shelter. We haven't seen very much of that in the news lately.

I remember working years ago on a project in Armenia after an earthquake where the central square of (inaudible) Armenia became temporary housing and then we were able to come back as US-DAY-ID (phonetic) had built permanent housing and was relocating people, to work with the population to reimagine, again, "Well, how do we restore this iconic place as the heart and soul of the center of your city?" But, meantime, it did a really good job providing temporary housing through the kinds of shelters that aid organizations are able to bring in.

MS. VEY: Thanks so much. I mean, obviously, these are just really, really complex

issues that are just made more vivid during this moment.

So, we've talk about where your organizations have been, and certainly the range of things that you, and other partner organizations, are doing in this moment. But I want to pivot a little bit to look forward.

After nearly two months of lockdown, near lockdown, in many states, the conversation is starting to pivot to, "How do we begin to reopen our economy safely?"

But it's going to be a long, it's going to be a really difficult road, and one that hopefully will lead us back, not to normal, but to really a far more just and a more equitable country.

So, what I want to do is just talk a little bit about what the future looks like in the context of public spaces in the near term, but also in the months, and really, in the years to come.

Phil, I'm going to come to you for a second. Many restaurants and other retail and service businesses have obviously been quite devastated by the pandemic, particularly many black owned businesses and those that are located in low-income communities, yet, even when those businesses are able to begin to reopen, when they're allowed to reopen for onsite patrons, demand is going to remain pretty low if people don't feel safe and they don't feel comfortable, or that they could be protected in those spaces.

So as the weather in this part of the world warms, how can we start to be thinking a lot more creatively about opening the public realm. You know, streets, parks, parking lots, for businesses.

For restaurants, you started to see a little bit of this in some cities -- Pensacola, Tampa in Florida -- but also, you know, businesses like barber shops, which might be at least while the weather is warm, a stop gap, as we start to focus on reopening. And how, in that context, can leaders really ensure that some of the most vulnerable businesses, in the most vulnerable communities, are prioritized?

MR. MYRICK: I'm going to answer your second question first because then I'm going to follow that by a whole long list of ideas for how public spaces can be put to good use. But I just want to caution, the priority has to be on these neighborhoods that need help the most. And the priority also has to be on working with those residents and find out where their needs are.

So, we can come up with a bunch of great ideas and they could be the wrong ideas and we don't want to be the (inaudible) to we are here to solve your problem without asking them first what problems do you need solved above all else.

So then, to your first question, I really do think this is a time where we can think expansively about the role of public spaces, and how they can be put to a different range of purposes that we haven't necessarily seen traditionally, at least in North America.

For example, the reopening of neighborhoods through public markets. Public markets are incredibly agile and incredibly vital to bringing food to all types of communities, and they can operate almost anywhere. Cities, we think, should really be exploring how to expand and support their market systems, and increase that food supply, and bring food close to where people are holed up.

Barcelona, for example, has a big market program where no resident is further than a 10-minute walk from a public market. We'd love to get to that point. Someday, but now, we need to reach into those neighborhoods that are food deserts and markets is one way to do that.

We need to look beyond parks to, like you said, Jennifer, parking lots, streets, alleys, all kinds of distributed public spaces that can reach closer to peoples' homes so that they don't have to travel far.

And then, almost every conceivable use should be considered for opening up in the public realm because as the warm weather visits us, whereas more and more space that is safer to operate in out of doors than in. And so, I think allowing businesses to open out of doors, where they can at least do some of their operations, is a really exciting prospect.

Now, again to Warren's point, it would be very easy for this to become over-policed. And so, I would favor if cities can sort of create these bureaucracy-free zones and allow things to go outside that under normal regulations would never be permitted. And for the regulations to focus on health and safety, obviously, and physical distancing, and the kinds of guidelines that help these things roll out successfully, like we've done with public markets in three cities.

We're working with AROB (phonetic) to provide very clear guidelines for spacing out

vendors and shoppers so that they can go ahead and operate safely.

But anyway, I think outdoor restaurants, outdoor food, outdoor vending, different types of retailing, and then services -- you mentioned haircuts; I think we can be ready for that soon.

Laundry pick-up/drop-off, pet grooming, manicures, pedicures; services like meal distribution and the temporary washrooms like they've been doing in some public spaces; health clinics. Some neighborhoods, you know, housing may be what they need, and a parking lot might be the place to put it.

Civic uses, public free civic uses hopefully. So, I think we need to start thinking about this. How would we safely roll out exercise class in the street, walking classes, recreation programs, libraries that use more of their outdoor space than in. Vegetable gardens, can we set up vegetable plots in the street, in the parking spaces.

I don't know. Jennifer, maybe we could do safe dance parties in the street, maybe we would have to mark it off so that everybody is 10 feet apart but you can imagine one of those silent dance parties happening in the streets of Oakland, right Warren.

I think when we start to explore these things it could actually become a really soulful experience for all of us who are looking for -- you know, we are dancing in our balconies right now, and we're clapping for the emergency response workers, but we need to expand that menu and tap our local talent, tap our local artists, tap the ideas of the people in the community.

We want the micromobility too, to get around town and to our places of work. But I guess, I think the combination of these ideas can create these really unusual experiences that put our communities back together both economically, but also just in terms of our connections to other people, and bringing healthcare and place management into neighborhoods that haven't seen them before.

MS. VEY: Sure. Yeah --

MR. LOGAN: You just stole my answer --

MR. MYRICK: Oh, shoot (laughter).

MS. VEY: But Warren, I want to pivot actually, and talk a little bit about building on some

of the comments that Phil said, and as we even think beyond kind of the reopening, even in the context of street restrictions. People have been calling for this certainly prior to COVID-19. So, how permanent do you think we can make some of this sort of reopening of public space?

And do you see that happening in Oakland, or eventually are we just going to kind of go back?

MR. LOGAN: I'm going to step aside from that question a little bit because I'm not allowed to say that any of this can be permanent because it's all a pilot.

But I can tell you that for sure the thing that we are taking from this that is absolutely permanent is the lessons learned; that this is, in fact, possible, even if we change it completely in the future, right. That it is, in fact, possible to close a bunch of streets overnight and that the sky won't fall down.

To touch on Phil's point, I just want to add to that because I know we're short on time as well, that we are sort of exploring that maybe we expand parklets around our businesses, let's do street closures on the weekends like Sunday Streets.

The big issue here, though, in thinking about our communities of color and our disadvantaged businesses, is that it's one thing to just say, "Okay, you can request a parklet." But it's altogether different effort to look at the regulatory scheme around how to get a parklet and say, "Can we make this easier?"

So, just very technical for the folks listening at home, that we're thinking about adjusting the permit itself to make it just super simple, like idiot-proof, and also free, so that you can apply for these types of mechanisms. And then thinking, okay, in advance of that parklet that you're going to want to request, do you need a business permit to adjust that you can operate alcohol outside? Okay, can we adjust the cabaret license that goes along with that?

And if you need a -- there's a sound ordinance that we have -- okay, can we adjust that as well so that all of this can be super streamlined, and really simple for folks to just get back to business immediately.

So, it's not just opening up the public space, but it's also opening up regulatory schemes that made all of these things challenging, just from a paperwork process, and quite frankly, saving my staff some time going through all that paperwork as well. So, I just want to lift that up as well.

MS. VEY: Yeah, and certainly, these are the things we should be thinking about in terms of permanency, probably some of these things should have been done a long time ago and maybe this is the moment to ease up on some of these regulations.

So Carol, I'm going to ask one sort of meta-question here, and then I'm going to combine with one of the questions that came in from one of our viewers.

In an earlier conversation that we had, you really emphasized this point that parks and other public spaces just really need to be considered essential infrastructure. And so, do you think the pandemic is really going to help us shift in that direction?

Or do you think in light of all the fiscal challenges that cities are going to be under in the months, in the years to come, that actually the opposite might happen, and that we'll start to see less investment, not just in creating new public spaces, but even in maintaining them? And then, that that means equitable access to the spaces would just become more limited and not less?

And I'm going to sort of combine that with another question I'd like you to respond to because I thought it was an interesting one and maybe this gets to part of this issue about, you know, maintaining spaces and creative ways to do that, is do you see that there's a role for new creativity even around workforce in hiring, in kind of WPA-style projects around tree planting and maintaining, that may then help mitigate the fiscal constraints, depending on who pays for it?

MS. COLETTA: Those are good questions. I think that I certainly hope that if ever we needed proof that parks matter, we had that over the last month and a half, two months. So, I would hope that parks, in fact, will be considered essential infrastructure.

I also believe it's incumbent upon those of us who run parks to demonstrate that parks can be more than simply play, and recreation, and health; totally essential benefits for the community. But I've been thinking a lot about this decimation of Main Street America.

I'm a small business owner, my daughter owns a restaurant, and I keep thinking, how will local and small businesses come back? And what role can public space play in helping them get back, in giving them cheaper options in terms of how to do business less frequently, less demands; perhaps, as Warren says, with less bureaucracy.

And so, that's something I'm thinking a lot about. And how could we help imagine that, create that, and host that for small businesses?

In terms of the role for new workforce, I think workforce is a place, frankly, that we are not thinking big enough in the country. And that then makes it very difficult because of financial flows, to think big enough at city levels.

Certainly, we have an opportunity to give people things to do, and meaningful things to do on a volunteer basis. But where we've lost a lot of earned revenue, and a lot of people are taking municipal budget cuts in our world, it is very difficult to think, "Well, where will we get the funds to employ more people?" I mean, it's just tough to think about.

But, if we had Federal consideration -- you mentioned WPA, I mean, we can put those people to work all day long in meaningful jobs that gain skills and move you onto the next level.

I worry about the internships, the paid internships for kids in high school and college, and missing out on that -- which is very much needed income, and very much needed skill-building, and just learning the ways of work -- it's going to be missing this summer and I think we'll all be the poorer for it.

MS. VEY: Yeah, I know. It seems like there's a lot of opportunities. I mean, we already know that we have a lot of issues around youth, that kind of missing group, and their ability to be employed, even, certainly, prior to COVID-19.

And so this could really be an opportunity to think a little bit more expansively about how to engage that youth, to get their sort of foot in the door while at the same time, maybe having that opportunity to maintain parks in their own neighborhood.

So, I want to ask, I have an interesting question here that we haven't really touched on so much, so I'll throw it out to the group. I'll paraphrase it a little bit, but it really gets to -- it's sort of issues

around the digital divide.

One of the things we're hearing about is for people that don't have good internet access at home. They are driving to parking lots and sitting outside of the public library -- which has, in many cases, allowed their Wi-Fi in the public realm -- and they are sitting outside of restaurants or other things that have Wi-Fi access; but what does it really mean, when we think about this digital divide, how the public realm can start offering -- certainly not just now, but beyond that -- more access to help bridge some of those digital divide gaps?

And as we think about 5G digital capacity, and even -- this even ties into a better conversation about just wiring in general, and kind of smart cities concepts, energy efficiency and others; what are the opportunities there?

MS. COLETTA: Just to say, I think that opportunity is obvious. Why do parks and public libraries exist? They exist because most of us can't afford to have our own park, or our own library, so we collectively -- the We -- build parks and public libraries.

So, to the extent that we can't all afford great digital, then we put it in a public place so that we can share it in common. That's what civic commons really ought to be about.

So, I think that's one of many things that we could pool our resources, if you will, under the banner of public, and think about doing together today.

MS. VEY: Oh, go ahead, Phil and then Warren.

MR. MYRICK: I think if you follow the example of the City of Portland, that container idea that was focused on safe storage of peoples' possessions but with Wi-Fi and outlets.

That's an idea that is infinitely expandable, and maybe that's something that we need to start looking at in terms of there being this pods that can be delivered to locations in neighborhoods that don't have any good Wi-Fi and they can't get to a downtown location where there is public Wi-Fi for instance.

But if the Wi-Fi can come to these neighborhoods along with a set of other services, that can be including meals, programming, portable libraries, there's all kinds of ways that you could think

about with that idea.

MS. VEY: Warren, you want to jump in?

MR. LOGAN: Sure. Echoing both of their points, I will just share, one of the challenges we've noticed in Oakland -- and I bring up the children that you pointed out, Carol -- that as kids are now learning at their homes, the biggest gap has been access to, not just internet at all, but high speed internet because if your parents are working on laptops from home, you've got a brother and a sister who are also trying to learn digitally -- I'm on Zoom calls all day, happily, with colleagues that are like, "Hold on, I've got to find a good Wi-Fi in the corner because my kid is in one corner." That is a big challenge.

I think it's raising this issue that maybe 10 years ago when cities started exploring the idea that everyone should just have free Wi-Fi or high-speed internet, I don't think people took that seriously.

And now I want us to return to that issue because as we are starting to look at what should be permanent, when I think about the congestion and the air quality that has been sort of a big issue for mostly all cities, and especially in the Bay Area, one of the things people noticed is that we can address congestion on our freeways with better Wi-Fi service at home.

And that's not a linkage that we typically think about, but it's something that I've been really encouraging our regional planners to consider is that we need to explore these types of solutions in the sort of digital divide space as well.

MS. VEY: Great. You know, I can typically relate to -- having a husband and three kids all working, schooling, from home.

I just kicked everybody out today (laughter) just to make sure that my Wi-Fi capacity could handle this webcast. So, it is really a truism, and hopefully this will spur us to think about bigger and better solutions to bridge some of these divides moving forward.

So, we are at time in another 30 seconds, and I'm going to have this be a wrap. I really just want to thank all of you, the panelists, for sharing your insights today, for taking the time. I think this has really been fantastic.

I know I've learned a lot from the discussion. I certainly hope our viewers learned a lot from the discussion as well; I'm sure that they did. And that we're all really inspired to integrate a lot of what we learned into our work, into our work now, into our work in the future.

Again, thanks to the panelists. Thanks to our viewers for turning in. If you want to watch it again, or want to tell friends, this has been recorded, so it will be an opportunity to view it or to pass it on moving forward, and we'll make sure everybody gets a chance to do that. So, thanks everyone and please be well.

MR. LOGAN: Thanks everyone.

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